

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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MOZAMBIQUE: Machel in a Bind []

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Summary

The Machel regime is having difficulties coping with deteriorating domestic conditions caused primarily by the South African backed-insurgency and the worst drought on record. Although our information on the insurgency is limited, government forces over the past year appear to have made some headway in the South, but the insurgents have been more active in the central and northern provinces. We believe that the National Resistance of Mozambique (RENAMO) will intensify its efforts during the rainy season next month and that the Mozambican military will be unable to respond effectively. []

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The insurgency has aggravated economic problems caused by the drought and economic mismanagement, and the country is now in the grip of a severe crisis, including famine conditions in several areas. Machel's desire to obtain some economic relief--which has not been forthcoming from Moscow--underlies his recent overtures to the West. []

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This memorandum was prepared for the Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs at the request of the NIO for Africa. It was written by [] Africa Division of the Office of African and Latin American Analysis. It has been coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Questions and comments are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Africa Division, ALA []

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The Insurgency

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[redacted]
[redacted] Mozambican armed forces appeared to have been somewhat more successful during the past year in their operations against the insurgents in the southern provinces. [redacted]

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[redacted] Moreover, the US Embassy reports that government forces have "liberated" a number of people--whom they cannot feed--in Gaza and Inhambane provinces. Maputo also claims its forces destroyed a number of insurgent base camps in these provinces. [redacted]

The Army has been unable, however, to prevent the expansion of RENAMO activities into the key northern provinces of Nampula and Zambesia. The insurgents are active in nine of the country's 10 provinces--only Cabo Delgado remains unaffected. [redacted]

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[redacted]

[redacted]

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Impact of New Soviet Weapons Deliveries

Moscow's concern over Machel's vulnerability has been reflected in increased shipments of military hardware to Mozambique--much of which will not be useful against the insurgents--during the past year, including air defense equipment, artillery pieces, tanks, fighter and transport aircraft, and helicopters. Moscow's efforts to upgrade the Mozambican armed forces have been highlighted by the introduction of at least 15 MIG-21 interceptors and eight MI-24 helicopter gunships--both likely to be piloted by Cubans. [redacted]

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More and newer weapons are unlikely, in our judgment, to improve significantly the government's counterinsurgency efforts or enable Mozambique to defend against a South African attack. The MIG-21 is not very effective in a ground attack role, and Pretoria's Mirage fighters have consistently outperformed MIG-21s in clashes over Angola. The MI-24 will improve the Army's counterinsurgency capabilities, but will only partly compensate for the poor performance of government troops who appear increasingly reluctant to engage RENAMO forces. [redacted]

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Overtures to the West

[redacted] the USSR's failure to provide significant economic assistance was the key consideration in Machel's decision to improve relations with the West. We agree that the Mozambicans are motivated by a near desperate need for increased aid and investment, but we believe a strong secondary motivation is Maputo's desire to gain US help in restraining its powerful neighbor, and in facilitating a political and economic dialogue with Pretoria. Mozambicans remain deeply dependent on security assistance from the Communist world, however, and in the absence of a significant increase in help from the West Machel's current moderate tack could end abruptly. [redacted]

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Improved Relations with the US. The Machel regime continues to signal its satisfaction with, and its desire for further progress in, relations with Washington. Press coverage of the US continues to improve and during his recent West European trip Machel publicly emphasized the improved nature of the relationship with Washington. The Minister of Information recently called for closer cooperation with US journalists and the US Government. [redacted]

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We think the relationship is fragile, however, reflecting at this point practical necessity rather than an ideological change of heart.

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[redacted] The regime's underlying hostility to US positions on a number of issues was reflected in the tone of a recent Mozambican address at the UN on world security issues. [redacted]

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Machel's West European Trip. Portuguese Prime Minister Soares' comment to US Embassy officers that Machel's visit to Portugal was long on good will and short on substance appropriately sums up [redacted] Machel's trip to five Western European nations.

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-- In Lisbon Machel received an effusive welcome at the official level and a cordial reception from the Portuguese public. The Mozambicans were disappointed by Lisbon's reported decision not to finalize a previously discussed expansion of credit lines to Mozambique or to increase military cooperation. The Portuguese, in turn, were frustrated by Mozambique's refusal to sign a consular agreement and by their inability to obtain any indication from Machel of how he intended to demonstrate a commitment to genuine nonalignment. [redacted]

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- In Paris Machel claimed to have asked for and received a promise of French military aid. The French deny having made any commitments, however, and say only that a study will be undertaken to assess Mozambique's needs. Nonetheless, African affairs adviser Guy Penne told US Embassy officers that both he and Mitterrand believe Machel sincerely desires to lessen Soviet influence.
- In Brussels Machel held discussions with EC officials and indicated a stronger than expected interest in membership in the next Lome convention. EC officials were also impressed by Machel's moderate and pragmatic tone.
- In the Hague the Mozambicans pushed hard for additional aid from the Dutch, who are already one of the leading aid contributors to Mozambique. The Dutch made no new commitments/
- In London Machel obtained agreement for limited financing of some development projects/

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The Pretoria Factor

Machel's ability to reverse the tide of events in Mozambique depends greatly on the state of Mozambique's relations with South Africa. Since RENAMO relies heavily on South African military support, the level of insurgent activity in Mozambique to a great extent reflects South African priorities in Mozambique. The relatively static nature of the guerrilla campaign over the past year--RENAMO receding in the south but pushing forward in the central and northern regions--suggests that Pretoria, rather than pushing to topple the Machel regime in the near future, is content for now to keep it weak and distracted. RENAMO's almost nonexistent political structure and the risk of greater Soviet and Cuban involvement may have induced some caution in Pretoria, which had appeared quite bullish about RENAMO's prospects last year.

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South Africa does not appear to be using RENAMO at this time to apply pressure on Machel to control the ANC, preferring instead to strike directly--as it did in May and earlier this month--at ANC facilities in Mozambique. Nor has Pretoria used RENAMO so far this year to squeeze Zimbabwe, either by sabotaging the pipeline or large-scale attacks on the 2000 to 3000 Zimbabwean soldiers guarding Zimbabwe's transportation lines in Mozambique. This trend, however, could be reversed with little warning.

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The Mozambicans for their part appear increasingly anxious to resume the Komatipoort dialogue--recent bilateral talks have taken place at the border town of Komatipoort--in order to mitigate the threat posed by RENAMO. They are also attempting to facilitate commercial cooperation with South Africa, presumably at least partly in the hope that South African businessmen will press Pretoria to stop supporting RENAMO. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The South Africans have told US officials they have sent an expanded agenda for discussion following a Mozambican request for a meeting. The Mozambicans, however, maintain they have heard nothing from Pretoria. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

Machel seems to have taken personal charge of the government's efforts to cope with the insurgency and the drought. At the last party congress in early May, he reorganized the government and created new regional political and military authorities that report directly to him. His much heralded tour of West Europe also focused attention on his personal role. The government's continued inability to solve the country's mounting problems, however, could backfire on Machel: [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Machel was jeered during a speech in Zambesia. [REDACTED]

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Although South Africa does not appear to be stepping up its support for RENAMO, we expect that the government forces will lose further ground as the insurgents take advantage of the approaching rainy season. Embassy reports of growing famine conditions in Gaza and Inhambane provinces suggest that the government will have little if any success in reversing the steep economic decline. While Western emergency aid may help alleviate the disaster, we do not expect very much direct economic assistance from West European nations. [REDACTED]

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Although the government probably will not be able to prevent insurgent successes over the next few months, the lightly armed guerrillas will not be able to challenge the government's hold on the major population centers. Heavy insurgent pressure, however, will aggravate the economic decline and bring Machel and even his moderate supporters to call for more Communist support to cope with RENAMO. [REDACTED]

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